The Courtship of Miles Standish

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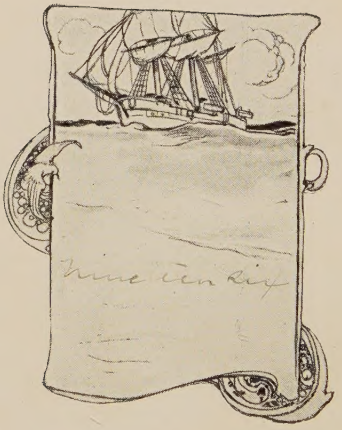
:Her Book:

THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH.



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THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH

BY

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

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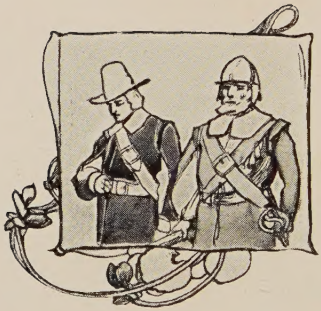


THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH.

I.

MILES STANDISH.

IN the Old Colony days, in Plymouth the land of the Pilgrims,
To and fro in a room of his simple and primitive dwelling,
Clad in doublet and hose, and boots of Cordovan leather,
Strode, with a martial air, Miles Standish the Puritan Captain.

Buried in thought he seemed,
with his hands behind him, and pausing
Ever and anon to behold
his glittering weapons of warfare,
Hanging in shining array
along the walls of the chamber,—
Cutlass and corselet of steel,
and his trusty sword of Damascus,
Curved at the point and inscribed
with its mystical Arabic sentence,
While underneath, in a corner, were
fowling-piece, musket, and matchlock.
Short of stature he was,
but strongly built and athletic,
Broad in the shoulders, deep-chested,
with muscles and sinews of iron;
Brown as a nut was his face,
but his russet beard was already
Flaked with patches of snow,
as hedges sometimes in November.
Near him was seated John Alden,
his friend and household companion,

Writing with diligent speed
at a table of pine by the window;
Fair-haired, azure-eyed,
with delicate Saxon complexion,

Having the dew of his youth,
and the beauty thereof, as the captives
Whom Saint Gregory saw, and
exclaimed, "Not Angles, but Angels."
Youngest of all was he of the men
who came in the May Flower.

Suddenly breaking the silence,
the diligent scribe interrupting,
Spake, in the pride of his heart,
Miles Standish the Captain of Plymouth.
"Look at these arms," he said,
"the warlike weapons that hang here
Burnished and bright and clean,
as if for parade or inspection!
This is the sword of Damascus
I fought with in Flanders; this breastplate---
Well I remember the day!—
once saved my life in a skirmish;
Here in front you can see
the very dint of the bullet
Fired point-blank at my heart
by a Spanish arcabucero.
Had it not been of sheer steel,
the forgotten bones of Miles Standish
Would at this moment be mould,
in their grave in the Flemish morasses."
Thereupon answered John Alden,
but looked not up from his writing:

"Truly the breath of the Lord
hath slackened the speed of the bullet;
He in his mercy preserved you,
to be our shield and our weapon!"

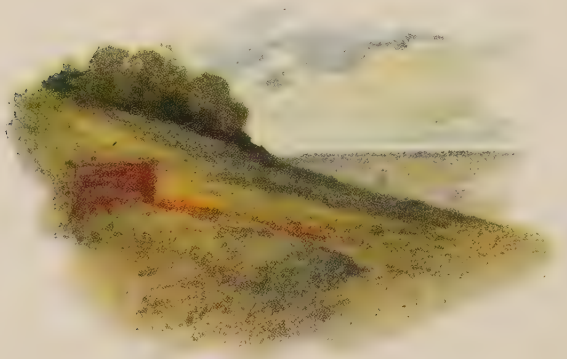
Still the Captain continued,
unheeding the words of the stripling:
"See, how bright they are burnished,
as if in an arsenal hanging;

That is because I have done it myself,
and not left it to others.
Serve yourself, would you be well served,
is an excellent adage;

So I take care of my arms,
as you of your pens and your inkhorn.
Then, too, there are my soldiers,
my great, invincible army,

Twelve men, all equipped,
having each his rest and his matchlock,
Eighteen shillings a month,
together with diet and pillage,
And, like Cæsar, I know the name
of each of my soldiers!"
This he said with a smile, that
danced in his eyes, as the sunbeams
Dance on the waves of the sea,
and vanish again in a moment.
Alden laughed as he wrote,
and still the Captain continued:
"Look! you can see from this window
my brazen howitzer planted
High on the roof of the church,
a preacher who speaks to the purpose,
Steady, straightforward, and strong,
with irresistible logic,
Orthodox, flashing conviction right
into the hearts of the heathen.
Now we are ready, I think,
for any assault of the Indians;

Let them come, if they like,
and the sooner they try it the better,—
Let them come, if they like,
be it sagamore, sachem, or pow-wow,
Aspinet, Samoset, Corbitant,
Squanto, or Tokamahamon!"



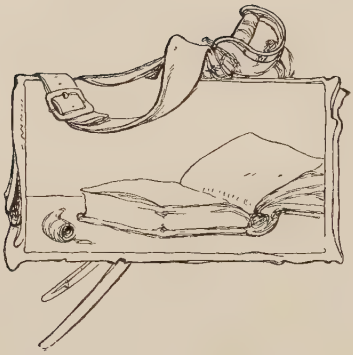
Long at the window he stood,
and wistfully gazed on the landscape,
Washed with a cold gray mist,
the vapoury breath of the east-wind,
Forest and meadow and hill,
and the steel-blue rim of the ocean,

Lying silent and sad, in the
afternoon shadows and sunshine.
Over his countenance flitted a
shadow like those on the landscape,
Gloom intermingled with light; and
his voice was subdued with emotion,
Tenderness, pity, regret,
as after a pause he proceeded:
"Yonder there, on the hill by the sea,
lies buried Rose Standish;
Beautiful rose of love, that bloomed
for me by the wayside!
She was the first to die of all
who came in the May Flower!
Green above her is growing the field
of wheat we have sown there!
Better to hide from the Indian scouts
the graves of our people,
Lest they should count them and see
how many already have perished!"
Sadly his face he averted, and strode
up and down, and was thoughtful.

Fixed to the opposite wall was
a shelf of books, and among them
Prominent three, distinguished alike
for bulk and for binding;
Bariffe's Artillery Guide,
and the Commentaries of Cæsar
Out of the Latin translated by
Arthur Goldinge of London,
And, as if guarded by these,
between them was standing the Bible.
Musing a moment before them,
Miles Standish paused, as if doubtful
Which of the three he should choose
for his consolation and comfort,
Whether the wars of the Hebrews,
the famous campaigns of the Romans,
Or the Artillery practice,
designed for belligerent Christians.
Finally down from its shelf
he dragged the ponderous Roman,
Seated himself at the window, and
opened the book, and in silence

Opened the book, and in silence
Turned o'er the well-worn leaves.

Turned o'er the well-worn leaves, where thumb-marks thick on the margin,
Like the trample of feet, proclaimed the battle was hottest.
Nothing was heard in the room but the hurrying pen of the stripling,
Busily writing epistles important, to go by the May Flower,
Ready to sail on the morrow, or next day at latest, God willing!
Homeward bound with the tidings of all that terrible winter,
Letters written by Alden, and full of the name of Priscilla,
Full of the name and the fame of the Puritan maiden Priscilla!



II.

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP.

Nothing was heard in the room
but the hurrying pen of the stripling,
Or an occasional sigh from the
labouring heart of the Captain,
Reading the marvellous words
and achievements of Julius Cæsar.
After a while he exclaimed, as he smote
with his hand, palm downwards,
Heavily on the page: "A wonderful
man was this Cæsar!
You are a writer, and I am a fighter,
but here is a fellow
Who could both write and fight,
and in both was equally skilful!"

Straightway answered and spake
John Alden, the comely, the youthful:
"Yes, he was equally skilled, as you say,
with his pen and his weapons.
Somewhere have I read, but where
I forget, he could dictate
Seven letters at once, at the same
time writing his memoirs."
"Truly," continued the Captain,
not heeding or hearing the other,
"Truly a wonderful man
was Caius Julius Cæsar!
Better be first, he said,
in a little Iberian village,
Than be second in Rome, and I think
he was right when he said it.
Twice was he married before he
was twenty, and many times after;
Battles five hundred he fought,
and a thousand cities he conquered;
He, too, fought in Flanders,
as he himself has recorded;

Finally he was stabbed by his
friend, the orator Brutus!
Now, do you know what he did
on a certain occasion in Flanders,

When the rear-guard of his army
retreated, the front giving way too,
And the immortal Twelfth Legion
was crowded so closely together

There was no room for their swords?
Why, he seized a shield from a soldier,
Put himself straight at the head of his
troops, and commanded the captains,
Calling on each by his name,
to order forward the ensigns;
Then to widen the ranks, and give
more room for their weapons;
So he won the day,
the battle of something-or-other.
That's what I always say: if you
wish a thing to be well done,
You must do it yourself,
you must not leave it to others!"

All was silent again;
the Captain continued his reading.
Nothing was heard in the room
but the hurrying pen of the stripling
Writing epistles important to go
next day by the May Flower,

Filled with the name and the fame
of the Puritan maiden Priscilla;
Every sentence began or closed
with the name of Priscilla,

Till the treacherous pen,
to which he confided the secret,
Strove to betray it by singing
and shouting the name of Priscilla!

Finally closing his book,
with a bang of the ponderous cover,
Sudden and loud as the sound
of a soldier grounding his musket,
Thus to the young man spake
Miles Standish the Captain of Plymouth:
"When you have finished your work,
I have something important to tell you.
Be not however in haste; I can wait;
I shall not be impatient!"
Straightway Alden replied,
as he folded the last of his letters,
Pushing his papers aside,
and giving respectful attention:
"Speak; for whenever you speak,
I am always ready to listen,
Always ready to hear whatever
pertains to Miles Standish."
Thereupon answered the Captain,
embarrassed, and culling his phrases:
"'Tis not good for a man to be alone,
say the Scriptures.

This have I said before, and
again and again I repeat it;
Every hour in the day, I think it,
and feel it, and say it.

Since Rose Standish died,
my life has been weary and dreary;
Sick at heart have I been,
beyond the healing of friendship.
Oft in my lonely hours have
I thought of the maiden Priscilla.

She is alone in the world;
her father and mother and brother
Died in the winter together;
I saw her going and coming,
Now to the grave of the dead,
and now to the bed of the dying,
Patient, courageous, and strong,
and said to myself, that if ever
There were angels on earth,
as there are angels in heaven,
Two have I seen and known;
and the angel whose name is Priscilla
Holds in my desolate life the place
which the other abandoned.
Long have I cherished the thought,
but never have dared to reveal it,
Being a coward in this, though
valiant enough for the most part.
Go to the damsel Priscilla,
the loveliest maiden of Plymouth,
Say that a blunt old Captain,
a man not of words but of actions,

"Say that a blunt old Captain . . .
Offers his hand and his heart."

Offers his hand and his heart,
the hand and heart of a soldier.
Not in these words, you know,
but this in short is my meaning;

I am a maker of war,
and not a maker of phrases.
You, who are bred as a scholar,
can say it in elegant language,

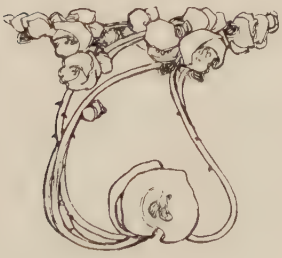
Such as you read in your books
of the pleadings and wooings of lovers,
Such as you think best adapted
to win the heart of a maiden."

When he had spoken, John Alden,
the fair-haired, taciturn stripling,
All aghast at his words, surprised,
embarrassed, bewildered,
Trying to mask his dismay
by treating the subject with lightness,

Trying to smile, and yet feeling
his heart stand still in his bosom,
Just as a timepiece stops in a house
that is stricken by lightning,
Thus made answer and spake,
or rather stammered than answered:
"Such a message as that, I am sure
I should mangle and mar it;
If you would have it well done,—
I am only repeating your maxim,—
You must do it yourself,
you must not leave it to others!"
But with the air of a man whom
nothing can turn from his purpose,
Gravely shaking his head, made
answer the Captain of Plymouth:
"Truly the maxim is good,
and I do not mean to gainsay it;
But we must use it discreetly,
and not waste powder for nothing.
Now, as I said before,
I was never a maker of phrases.

I can march up to a fortress
and summon the place to surrender,
But march up to a woman
with such a proposal, I dare not.
I am not afraid of bullets, nor shot
from the mouth of a cannon,
But of a thundering "No!"
point-blank from the mouth of a woman,
That I confess I'm afraid of, nor
am I ashamed to confess it!
So you must grant my request,
for you are an elegant scholar,
Having the graces of speech,
and skill in the turning of phrases."
Taking the hand of his friend,
who still was reluctant and doubtful,
Holding it long in his own,
and pressing it kindly, he added:
"Though I have spoken thus lightly,
yet deep is the feeling that prompts me,
Surely you cannot refuse what I ask
in the name of our friendship!"

Then made answer John Alden:
"The name of friendship is sacred;
What you demand in that name,
I have not the power to deny you!"
So the strong will prevailed,
subduing and moulding the gentler,
Friendship prevailed over love,
and Alden went on his errand.



III.

THE LOVER'S ERRAND.

So the strong will prevailed,
and Alden went on his errand.
Out of the street of the village,
and into the paths of the forest,
Into the tranquil woods, where
bluebirds and robins were building
Towns in the populous trees,
with hanging gardens of verdure,
Peaceful, aerial cities of joy
and affection and freedom.
All around him was calm,
but within him commotion and conflict,

Love contending with friendship,
and self with each generous impulse.
To and fro in his breast his thoughts
were heaving and dashing,
As in a foundering ship,
with every roll of the vessel,
Washes the bitter sea,
the merciless surge of the ocean!
"Must I relinquish it all,"
he cried with a wild lamentation,—
"Must I relinquish it all,
the joy, the hope, the illusion?
Was it for this I have loved,
and waited, and worshipped in silence?
Was it for this I have followed
the flying feet and the shadow
Over the wintry sea, to the
desolate shores of New England?
Truly the heart is deceitful, and out
of its depths of corruption
Rise like an exhalation,
the misty phantoms of passion;

Angels of light they seem,
but are only delusions of Satan.
All is clear to me now; I feel it,
I see it distinctly,

This is the hand of the Lord;
it is laid upon me in anger,
For I have followed too much
the heart's desires and devices,
Worshipping Astaroth blindly,
and impious idols of Baal.

This is the cross I must bear;
the sin and the swift retribution."

So through the Plymouth woods
John Alden went on his errand;
Crossing the brook at the ford, where
it brawled over pebble and shallow,
Gathering still, as he went,
the May-flowers blooming around him,
Fragrant, filling the air with a
strange and wonderful sweetness,
Children lost in the woods, and
covered with leaves in their slumber.
"Puritan flowers," he said,
"and the type of Puritan maidens,
Modest and simple and sweet,
the very type of Priscilla!
So I will take them to her;
to Priscilla the May-flower of Plymouth,
Modest and simple and sweet,
as a parting gift will I take them;

Breathing their silent farewells,
as they fade and wither and perish,

Soon to be thrown away
as is the heart of the giver."

So through the Plymouth woods
John Alden went on his errand;
Came to an open space,
and saw the disc of the ocean,
Sailless, sombre and cold with the
comfortless breath of the east-wind;
Saw the new-built house, and the
people at work in the meadow;
Heard, as he drew near the door,
the musical voice of Priscilla
Singing the hundredth Psalm,
the grand old Puritan anthem,
Music that Luther sang to the
sacred words of the Psalmist,
Full of the breath of the Lord,
consoling and comforting many.
Then, as he opened the door,
he beheld the form of the maiden
Seated beside her wheel, and the
carded wool like a snowdrift
Piled at her knee, her white hands
feeding the ravenous spindle,

While with her foot on the treadle
she guided the wheel in its motion.
Open wide on her lap lay the
well-worn psalm-book of Ainsworth,

Printed in Amsterdam, the words
and the music together,
Rough-hewn, angular notes, like stones
in the wall of a churchyard,

Darkened and overhung by the
running vine of the verses.
Such was the book from whose pages
she sang the old Puritan anthem,
She, the Puritan girl,
in the solitude of the forest,
Making the humble house and the
modest apparel of homespun
Beautiful with her beauty, and rich
with the wealth of her being!
Over him rushed, like a wind
that is keen and cold and relentless,
Thoughts of what might have been,
and the weight and woe of his errand;
All the dreams that had faded,
and all the hopes that had vanished;
All his life henceforth
a dreary and tenantless mansion,
Haunted by vain regrets,
and pallid, sorrowful faces.
Still he said to himself,
and almost fiercely he said it,

"Let not him that putteth his hand
to the plough look backwards;
Though the ploughshare cut through
the flowers of life to its fountains,

Though it pass o'er the graves of
the dead and the hearths of the living,
It is the will of the Lord;
and his mercy endureth for ever!"

So he entered the house: and the
hum of the wheel and the singing
Suddenly ceased; for Priscilla,
aroused by his step on the threshold,
Rose as he entered, and gave him
her hand, in signal of welcome.
Saying, "I knew it was you when
I heard your step in the passage;
For I was thinking of you,
as I sat there singing and spinning."
Awkward and dumb with delight, that
a thought of him had been mingled
Thus in the sacred psalm, that came
from the heart of the maiden,
Silent before her he stood,
and gave her the flowers for an answer,
Finding no words for his thought.
He remembered that day in the winter,
After the first great snow,
when he broke a path from the village,
Reeling and plunging along through
the drifts that encumbered the doorway,

Stamping the snow from his feet
as he entered the house, and Priscilla
Laughed at his snowy locks,
and gave him a seat by the fireside,

Grateful and pleased to know he had
thought of her in the snowstorm.
Had he but spoken then! perhaps not
in vain had he spoken;

Now it was all too late; the golden
moment had vanished!
So he stood there abashed,
and gave her the flowers for an answer,

Then they sat down and talked of the
birds and the beautiful Springtime,
Talked of their friends at home, and the
May Flower that sailed on the morrow.

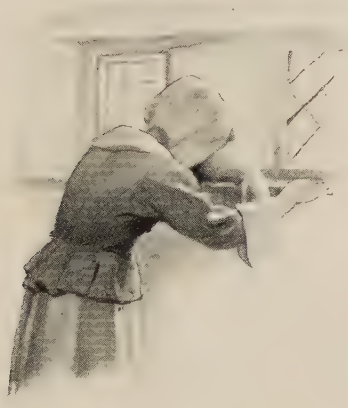
"I have been thinking all day,"
said gently the Puritan maiden,
"Dreaming all night, and thinking all
day, of the hedgerows of England,—
They are in blossom now,
and the country is all like a garden;
Thinking of lanes and fields, and the
song of the lark and the linnet,
Seeing the village street,
and familiar faces of neighbours
Going about as of old, and stopping
to gossip together,
And, at the end of the street,
the village church, with the ivy
Climbing the old gray tower,
and the quiet graves in the churchyard.
Kind are the people I live with,
and dear to me my religion;
Still my heart is so sad,
that I wish myself back in Old England.
You will say it is wrong,
but I cannot help it: I almost

Wish myself back in Old England,
I feel so lonely and wretched."

Thereupon answered the youth:
"Indeed I do not condemn you;
Stouter hearts than a woman's have
quailed in this terrible winter.
Yours is tender and trusting,
and needs a stronger to lean on;
So I have come to you now,
with an offer and proffer of marriage
Made by a good man and true,
Miles Standish the Captain of Plymouth!"

Thus he delivered his message,
the dexterous writer of letters,—
Did not embellish the theme,
nor array it in beautiful phrases,
But came straight to the point,
and blurted it out like a schoolboy;

Even the Captain himself could
hardly have said it more bluntly.
Mute with amazement and sorrow,
Priscilla the Puritan maiden



Looked into Alden's face,
her eyes dilated with wonder,
Feeling his words like a blow, that
stunned her and rendered her speechless;

Till at length she exclaimed,
interrupting the ominous silence:
"If the great Captain of Plymouth
is so very eager to wed me?

Why does he not come himself,
and take the trouble to woo me?
If I am not worth the wooing,
I surely am not worth the winning!"

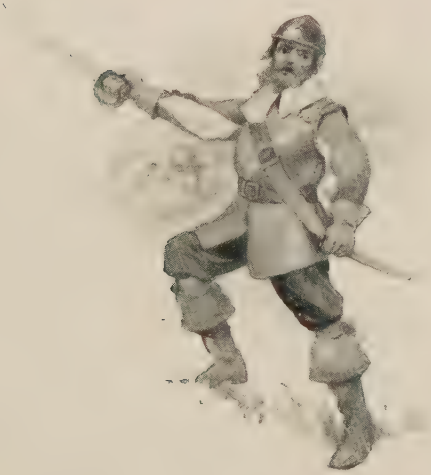
Then John Alden began explaining
and smoothing the matter,
Making it worse as he went,
by saying the Captain was busy,—
Had no time for such things;—
such things! the words grating harshly
Fell on the ear of Priscilla;
and swift as a flash she made answer:
"Has no time for such things,
as you call it, before he is married,
Would he be likely to find it,
or make it after the wedding?
That is the way with you men;
you don't understand us, you cannot.
When you have made up your minds,
after thinking of this one and that one,
Choosing, selecting, rejecting,
comparing one with another,
Then you make known your desire,
with abrupt and sudden avowal,
And are offended and hurt,
and indignant perhaps, that a woman

Does not respond at once to a love
that she never suspected,
Does not attain at a bound the height
to which you have been climbing.
This is not right nor just:
for surely a woman's affection
Is not a thing to be asked for,
and had for only the asking.
When one is truly in love,
one not only says it, but shows it.
Had he but waited awhile,
had he only showed that he loved me,
Even this Captain of yours — who knows? —
at last might have won me,
Old and rough as he is;
but now it never can happen."

Still John Alden went on,
unheeding the words of Priscilla,
Urging the suit of his friend,
explaining, persuading, expanding;

John Alden went on . . .
Urging the suit of his friend,
explaining, persuading, appealing

Spoke of his courage and skill,
and of all his battles in Flanders,
How with the people of God
he had chosen to suffer affliction,



How, in return for his zeal, they
had made him Captain of Plymouth;
He was a gentleman born,
could trace his pedigree plainly

Back to Hugh Standish of Duxbury Hall,
in Lancashire, England,
Who was the son of Ralph, and the
grandson of Thurston de Standish;
Heir unto vast estates,
of which he was basely defrauded,
Still bore the family arms,
and had for his crest a cock argent
Combed and wattled gules,
and all the rest of the blazon.
He was a man of honour,
of noble and generous nature;
Though he was rough, he was kindly;
she knew how during the winter
He had attended the sick,
with a hand as gentle as woman's;
Somewhat hasty and hot, he could
not deny it, and headstrong,
Stern as a soldier might be,
but hearty, and placable always,
Not to be laughed at and scorned,
because he was little of stature;

For he was great of heart,
magnanimous, courtly, courageous;
Any woman in Plymouth, nay,
any woman in England,

Might be happy and proud to be
called the wife of Miles Standish!
But as he warmed and glowed,
in his simple and eloquent language,

Quite forgetful of self, and full
of the praise of his rival,
Archly the maiden smiled, and,
with eyes overrunning with laughter,
Said, in a tremulous voice,
"Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

IV.

JOHN ALDEN.

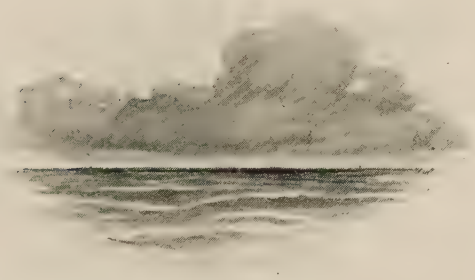
Into the open air John Alden,
perplexed and bewildered,
Rushed like a man insane,
and wandered alone by the seaside;
Paced up and down the sands,
and bared his head to the east-wind,
Cooling his heated brow,
and the fire and fever within him.
Slowly as out of the heavens,
with apocalyptical splendours,
Sank the City of God,
in the vision of John the Apostle,
So, with its cloudy walls of chrysolite,
jasper, and sapphire,

Sank the broad red sun,
and over its turrets uplifted
Glimmered the golden reed
of the angel who measured the city.

"Welcome, O wind of the East!"
he exclaimed in his wild exultation,
"Welcome, O wind of the East!"
from the caves of the misty Atlantic!
Blowing o'er fields of dulse,
and measureless meadows of sea-grass.
Blowing o'er rocky wastes,
and the grottoes and gardens of ocean!
Lay thy cold, moist hand on
my burning forehead, and wrap me
Close in thy garments of mist,
to allay the fever within me!"

Like an awakened conscience,
the sea was moaning and tossing,

Beating remorseful and loud
the mutable sands of the sea-shore.
Fierce in his soul was the struggle
and tumult of passions contending;



Love triumphant and crowned,
and friendship wounded and bleeding,
Passionate cries of desire,
and importunate pleadings of duty!
"Is it my fault," he said, "that the
maiden has chosen between us?

Is it my fault that he failed,—
my fault that I am the victor?"
Then within him there thundered a voice,
like the voice of the Prophet:

"It hath displeased the Lord!"—
and he thought of David's transgression,
Bathsheba's beautiful face, and his
friend in the front of the battle!

Shame and confusion of guilt,
and abasement and self-condemnation,
Overwhelmed him at once;
and he cried in the deepest contrition:
"It hath displeased the Lord!
It is the temptation of Satan!"

Then uplifting his head, he looked
at the sea, and beheld there
Dimly the shadowy form of the
May Flower riding at anchor,
Rocked on the rising tide, and ready
to sail on the morrow;
Heard the voices of men through
the mist, the rattle of cordage
Thrown on the deck, the shouts of the
mate, and the sailors' "Ay, ay, Sir!"
Clear and distinct, but not loud,
in the dripping air of the twilight.
Still for a moment he stood,
and listened, and stared at the vessel,

Then went hurriedly on, as one who,
seeing a phantom,
Stops, then quickens his pace,
and follows the beckoning shadow.
"Yes, it is plain to me now," he
murmured; "the hand of the Lord is
Leading me out of the land
of darkness, the bondage of error,
Through the sea, that shall lift
the walls of its waters around me,
Hiding me, cutting me off, from the
cruel thoughts that pursue me.
Back will I go o'er the ocean,
this dreary land will abandon,
Her whom I may not love,
and him whom my heart has offended.
Better to be in my grave in the
green old churchyard in England,
Close by my mother's side,
and among the dust of my kindred;
Better be dead and forgotten,
than living in shame and dishonour!

Sacred and safe and unseen,
in the dark of the narrow chamber
With me my secret shall lie,
like a buried jewel that glimmers

Bright on the hand that is dust, in the
chambers of silence and darkness, —
Yes, as the marriage ring
of the great espousal hereafter!"

Thus as he spake, he turned,
in the strength of his strong resolution,
Leaving behind him the shore,
and hurried along in the twilight,

Through the congenial gloom
of the forest silent and sombre,
Till he beheld the lights
in the seven houses of Plymouth,
Shining like seven stars in the dusk
and mist of the evening.

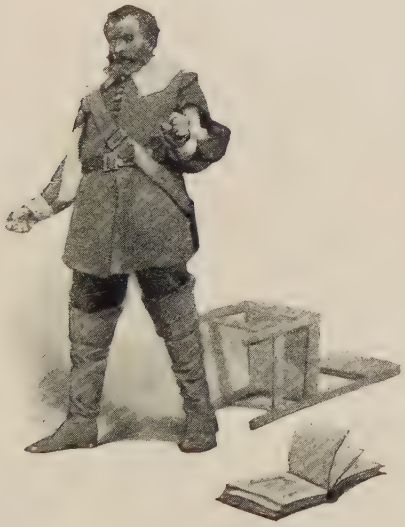
Soon he entered his door,
and found the redoubtable Captain
Sitting alone, and absorbed in
the martial pages of Cæsar,
Fighting some great campaign
in Hainault or Brabant or Flanders.
"Long have you been on your errand,"
he said with a cheery demeanour,
Even as one who is waiting an answer,
and fears not the issue.
"Not far off is the house,
although the woods are between us;
But you have lingered so long,
that while you were going and coming
I have fought ten battles and
sacked and demolished a city.
Come, sit down, and in order relate
to me all that has happened."

Then John Alden spake,
and related the wondrous adventure,

From beginning to end, minutely,
just as it happened;
How he had seen Priscilla, and how
he had sped in his courtship,
Only smoothing a little,
and softening down her refusal.
But when he came at length
to the words Priscilla had spoken,
Words so tender and cruel: "Why
don't you speak for yourself, John?"
Up leaped the Captain of Plymouth,
and stamped on the floor, till his armour
Clanged on the wall, where it hung,
with a sound of sinister omen.
All his pent-up wrath burst forth
in a sudden explosion,
E'en as a hand-grenade,
that scatters destruction around it.
Wildly he shouted, and loud:
"John Alden! you have betrayed me!
Me, Miles Standish, your friend!
have supplanted, defrauded, betrayed me!

"John Alden! you have betrayed me."

One of my ancestors ran his sword
through the heart of Wat Tyler;
Who shall prevent me from running
my own through the heart of a traitor?



Yours is the greater treason, for
yours is a treason to friendship!
You, who lived under my roof, whom
I cherished and loved as a brother;

You, who have fed at my board,
and drank at my cup, to whose keeping
I have intrusted my honour, my
thoughts the most sacred and secret,—
You too, Brutus! ah woe to
the name of friendship hereafter!
Brutus was Cæsar's friend,
and you were mine, but henceforward
Let there be nothing between us
save war, and implacable hatred!"

So spake the Captain of Plymouth,
and strode about in the chamber,
Chafing and choking with rage; like
cords were the veins on his temples
But in the midst of his anger
a man appeared at the doorway,
Bringing in uttermost haste
a message of urgent importance,
Rumours of danger and war
and hostile incursions of Indians!

Straightway the Captain paused, and,
without further question or parley,
Took from the nail on the wall
his sword with its scabbard of iron,

Buckled the belt round his waist,
and, frowning fiercely, departed.
Alden was left alone. He heard
the clank of the scabbard

Growing fainter and fainter,
and dying away in the distance.
Then he arose from his seat,
and looked forth into the darkness,
Felt the cool air blow on his cheek,
that was hot with the insult,
Lifted his eyes to the heavens, and,
folding his hands as in childhood,
Prayed in the silence of night
to the Father who seeth in secret.

Meanwhile the choleric Captain
strode wrathful away to the council,
Found it already assembled,
impatiently waiting his coming;
Men in the middle of life,
austere and grave in deportment,
Only one of them old, the hill
that was nearest to heaven,
Covered with snow, but erect,
the excellent Elder of Plymouth.

God had sifted three kingdoms
to find the wheat for this planting,
Then had sifted the wheat,
as the living seed of a nation;

So say the chronicles old,
and such is the faith of the people!
Near them was standing an Indian,
in attitude stern and defiant

Naked down to the waist,
and grim and ferocious in aspect;
While on the table before them
was lying unopened a Bible;
Ponderous, bound in leather,
brass-studded, printed in Holland,
And beside it outstretched the skin
of a rattlesnake glittered,
Filled, like a quiver, with arrows;
a signal and challenge of warfare,
Brought by the Indian, and speaking
with arrowy tongues of defiance.
This Miles Standish beheld, as he
entered, and heard them debating
What were an answer befitting
the hostile message and menace,
Talking of this and of that,
contriving, suggesting, objecting;
One voice only for peace,
and that the voice of the Elder,
Judging it wise and well
that some at least were converted,

Rather than any were slain,
for this was but Christian behaviour!
Then out spake Miles Standish,
the stalwart Captain of Plymouth,

Muttering deep in his throat,
for his voice was husky with anger,
"What! do you mean to make war
with milk and the water of roses?

Is it to shoot red squirrels
you have your howitzer planted
There on the roof of the church,
or is it to shoot red devils?
Truly the only tongue
that is understood by a savage
Must be the tongue of fire that speaks
from the mouth of the cannon!"
Thereupon answered and said
the excellent Elder of Plymouth,
Somewhat amazed and alarmed
at this irreverent language:
"Not so thought Saint Paul,
nor yet the other Apostles;
Not from the cannon's mouth were
the tongues of fire they spake with!"
But unheeded fell this mild
rebuke on the Captain,
Who had advanced to the table,
and thus continued discoursing:
"Leave this matter to me,
for to me by right it pertaineth.

War is a terrible trade;
but in the cause that is righteous,

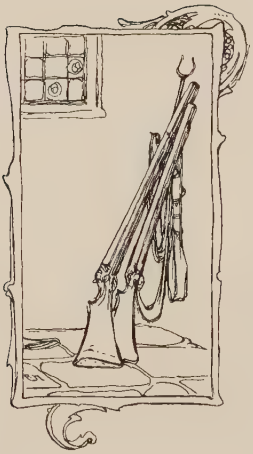
Sweet is the smell of powder;
and thus I answer the challenge!"

Then from the rattlesnake's skin,
with a sudden, contemptuous gesture,
Jerking the Indian arrows,
he filled it with powder and bullets

Full to the very jaws, and
handed it back to the savage,
Saying, in thundering tones:
"Here, take it! this is your answer!"

"Here, take it! this is your answer!"

Silently out of the room
then glided the glistening savage,
Bearing the serpent's skin,
and seeming himself like a serpent,
Winding his sinuous way in the dark
to the depths of the forest.



V.

THE SAILING OF THE MAY FLOWER.

Just in the gray of the dawn, as the
mists uprose from the meadows,
There was a stir and a sound
in the slumbering village of Plymouth;
Clanging and clicking of arms,
and the order imperative, "Forward!"
Given in tone suppressed, a tramp
of feet, and then silence.
Figures ten, in the mist,
marched slowly out of the village.
Standish the stalwart it was,
with eight of his valorous army,

Led by their Indian guide, by Hobomok,
friend of the white men,
Northward marching to quell
the sudden revolt of the savage.

Giants they seemed in the mist,
or the mighty men of King David;
Giants in heart they were,
who believed in God and the Bible,—
Ay, who believed in the smiting
of Midianites and Philistines.

Over them gleamed far off
the crimson banners of morning;
Under them loud on the sands,
the serried billows, advancing
Fired along the line,
and in regular order retreated.

Many a mile had they marched,
when at length the village of Plymouth
Woke from its sleep, and arose
intent on its manifold labours.
Sweet was the air and soft;
and slowly the smoke from the chimneys
Rose over roofs of thatch,
and pointing steadily eastward;
Men came forth from the doors,
and paused and talked of the weather,
Said that the wind had changed, and
was blowing fair for the May Flower;
Talked of their Captain's departure,
and all the dangers that menaced,

He being gone, the town, and what
should be done in his absence.
Merrily sang the birds,
and the tender voices of women

Consecrated with hymns
the common cares of the household.
Out on the sea rose the sun,
and the billows rejoiced at his coming;

Beautiful were his feet on the
purple tops of the mountains;
Beautiful on the sails of the
May Flower riding at anchor,
Battered and blackened and worn
by all the storms of the winter.
Loosely against her masts
was hanging and flapping her canvas,
Rent by so many gales, and patched
by the hands of the sailors.
Suddenly from her side,
as the sun rose over the ocean,
Darted a puff of smoke,
and floated seaward; anon rang
Loud over field and forest the
cannon's roar, and the echoes
Heard and repeated the sound,
the signal-gun of departure!
Ah! but with louder echoes
replied the hearts of the people!
Meekly, in voices subdued,
the chapter was read from the Bible,

Meekly the prayer was begun,
but ended in fervent entreaty!
Then from their houses in haste
came forth the Pilgrims of Plymouth,
Men and women and children,
all hurrying down to the sea-shore.
Eager, with tearful eyes, to say
farewell to the May Flower,
Homeward bound o'er the sea,
and leaving them here in the desert.

Foremost among them was Alden.
All night he had lain without slumber,
Turning and tossing about
in the heat and unrest of his fever.
He had beheld Miles Standish,
who came back late from the council,
Stalking into the room,
and heard him mutter and murmur,
Sometimes it seemed a prayer,
and sometimes it sounded like swearing,

Once he had come to the bed,
and stood there a moment in silence;
Then he had turned away, and said:
"I will not awake him;

Let him sleep on, it is best;
for what is the use of more talking!"
Then he extinguished the light,
and threw himself down on his pallet,

Dressed as he was, and ready to start
at the break of the morning,—
Covered himself with the cloak he
had worn in his campaigns in Flanders,
Slept as a soldier sleeps
in his bivouac, ready for action,
But with the dawn he arose;
in the twilight Alden beheld him
Put on his corselet of steel,
and all the rest of his armour,
Buckle about his waist
his trusty blade of Damascus
Take from the corner his musket,
and so stride out of the chamber.
Often the heart of the youth had
burned and yearned to embrace him,
Often his lips had essayed to speak,
imploring for pardon;
All the old friendship came back,
with its tender and grateful emotions;
But his pride overmastered the
nobler nature within him,—

Pride, and the sense of his wrong,
and the burning fire of the insult.
So he beheld his friend
departing in anger, but spake not,

Saw him go forth to danger,
perhaps to death, and he spake not!
Then he arose from his bed,
and heard what the people were saying,

Joined in the talk at the door,
with Stephen and Richard and Gilbert.
Joined in the morning prayer,
and in the reading of Scripture,
And, with the others, in haste went
hurrying down to the sea-shore,
Down to the Plymouth Rock,
that had been to their feet as a doorstep
Into a world unknown,—
the corner-stone of a nation!

There with his boat was the Master,
already a little impatient
Lest he should lose the tide,
or the wind might shift to the eastward,
Square-built, hearty, and strong,
with an odour of ocean about him,
Speaking with this one and that,
and cramming letters and parcels
Into his pockets capacious,
and messages mingled together

Into his narrow brain, till at last
he was wholly bewildered.
Nearer the boat stood Alden,
with one foot placed on the gunwale,

One still firm on the rock,
and talking at times with the sailors,
Seated erect on the thwarts,
all ready and eager for starting.

He too was eager to go,
and thus put an end to his anguish,
Thinking to fly from despair,
that swifter than keel is or canvas,
Thinking to drown in the sea the ghost
that would rise and pursue him.
But as he gazed on the crowd,
he beheld the form of Priscilla
Standing dejected among them,
unconscious of all that was passing.
Fixed were her eyes upon his,
as if she divined his intention,
Fixed with a look so sad,
so reproachful, imploring, and patient,
That with a sudden revulsion
his heart recoiled from its purpose,
As from the verge of a crag,
where one step more is destruction.
Strange is the heart of man,
with its quick, mysterious instincts!
Strange is the life of man,
and fatal or fated are moments,

He beheld the form of Priscilla
Standing dejected among them.

Whereupon turn, as on hinges,
the gates of the wall adamantine!

"Here I remain!" he exclaimed,
as he looked at the heavens above him,

Thanking the Lord whose breath had
scattered the mist and the madness,
Wherein, blind and lost, to death
he was staggering headlong.

"Yonder snow-white cloud,
that floats in the ether above me,
Seems like a hand that is pointing
and beckoning over the ocean.

There is another hand,
that is not so spectral and ghostlike,
Holding me, drawing me back,
and clasping mine for protection.
Float, O hand of cloud,
and vanish away in the ether!
Roll thyself up like a fist, to threaten
and daunt me; I heed not
Either your warning or menace,
or any omen of evil!
There is no land so sacred,
no air so pure and so wholesome,
As is the air she breathes, and the
soil that is pressed by her footsteps.
Here for her sake will I stay,
and like an invisible presence
Hover around her for ever,
protecting, supporting her weakness;
Yes! as my foot was the first
that stepped on this rock at the landing,
So, with the blessing of God,
shall it be the last at the leaving!'

Meanwhile the Master alert,
but with dignified air and important,
Scanning with watchful eye the tide
and the wind and the weather,
Walked about on the sands,
and the people crowded around him
Saying a few last words,
and enforcing his careful remembrance.
Then, taking each by the hand,
as if he were grasping a tiller,
Into the boat he sprang, and in haste
shoved off to his vessel,
Glad in his heart to get rid
of all this worry and flurry.
Glad to be gone from a land of sand
and sickness and sorrow,
Short allowance of victual,
and plenty of nothing but Gospel!
Lost in the sound of the oars
was the last farewell of the Pilgrims.
O strong hearts and true!
not one went back in the May Flower!

No, not one looked back,
who had set his hand to this ploughing!

Soon were heard on board the shouts
and songs of the sailors
Heaving the windlass round,
and hoisting the ponderous anchor.
Then the yards were braced,
and all sails set to the west-wind,

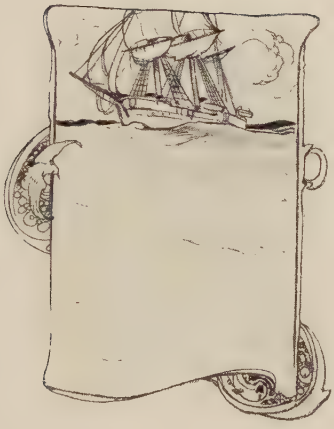
Blowing steady and strong; and the
May Flower sailed from the harbour,
Rounded the point of the Gurnet,
and leaving far to the southward

Island and cape of sand,
and the Field of the First Encounter,
Took the wind on her quarter,
and stood for the open Atlantic,

Borne on the send of the sea,
and the swelling hearts of the Pilgrims.

Long in silence they watched
the receding sail of the vessel,
Much endeared to them all,
as something living and human;
Then as if filled with the spirit,
and wrapt in a vision prophetic,
Baring his hoary head,
the excellent Elder of Plymouth
Said, "Let us pray!" and they prayed,
and thanked the Lord and took courage.
Mournfully sobbed the waves
at the base of the rock, and above them
Bowed and whispered the wheat
on the hill of death, and their kindred
Seemed to awake in their graves, and
to join in the prayer that they uttered.
Sun-illumined and white,
on the eastern verge of the ocean

Gleamed the departing sail,
like a marble slab in a graveyard;
Buried beneath it lay for ever
all hope of escaping.
Lo! as they turned to depart,
they saw the form of an Indian,
Watching them from the hill;
but while they spake with each other,
Pointing with outstretched hands,
and saying, "Look!" he had vanished.
So they returned to their homes;
but Alden lingered a little,
Musing alone on the shore,
and watching the wash of the billows
Round the base of the rock, and the
sparkle and flash of the sunshine,
Like the spirit of God,
moving visibly over the waters.



VI.

PRISCILLA.

Thus for a while he stood,
and mused by the shore of the ocean,
Thinking of many things,
and most of all of Priscilla;
And as if thought had the power
to draw to itself, like the loadstone,
Whatsoever it touches,
by subtile laws of its nature,

Lo! as he turned to depart,
Priscilla was standing beside him.

"Are you so much offended,
you will not speak to me?" said she.
"Am I so much to blame,
that yesterday when you were pleading
Warmly the cause of another,
my heart impulsive and wayward,
Pleaded your own, and spake out
forgetful perhaps of decorum?
Certainly you can forgive me
for speaking so frankly, for saying
What I ought not to have said,
yet now I can never unsay it;
For there are moments in life,
when the heart is so full of emotion,
That if by chance it be shaken,
or into its depths like a pebble
Drops some careless word,
it overflows, and its secret,

As he turned to depart,
Priscilla was standing beside him.

Spilt on the ground like water,
can never be gathered together,
Yesterday I was shocked, when
I heard you speak of Miles Standish,

Praising his virtues, transforming
his very defects into virtues,
Praising his courage and strength,
and even his fighting in Flanders,
As if by fighting alone you could
win the heart of a woman,

Quite overlooking yourself and the rest,
in exalting your hero.
Therefore I spake as I did,
by an irresistible impulse.
You will forgive me, I hope, for the
sake of the friendship between us,
Which is too true and too sacred
to be so easily broken!"
Thereupon answered John Alden,
the scholar, the friend of Miles Standish:
"I was not angry with you,
with myself alone I was angry,
Seeing haw badly I managed
the matter I had in my keeping."
"No!" interrupted the maiden,
with answer prompt and decisive;
"No; you were angry with me,
for speaking so frankly and freely.
It was wrong, I acknowledge;
for it is the fate of a woman
Long to be patient and silent,
to wait like a ghost that is speechless,

Till some questioning voice
dissolves the spell of its silence.
Hence is the inner life
of so many suffering women

Sunless and silent and deep,
like subterranean rivers
Running through caverns of darkness,
unheard, unseen, and unfruitful,

Chafing their channels of stone
with endless and profitless murmurs."
Thereupon answered John Alden,
the young man, the lover of women:
"Heaven forbid it, Priscilla;
and truly they seem to me always
More like the beautiful rivers
that watered the garden of Eden,
More like the river Euphrates,
through deserts of Havilah flowing,
Filling the land with delight,
and memories sweet of the garden."
"Ah, by these words, I can see,"
again interrupted the maiden,
"How very little you prize me,
or care for what I am saying.
When from the depths of my heart,
in pain and with secret misgiving,
Frankly I speak to you, asking for
sympathy only and kindness,
Straightway you take up my words,
that are plain and direct and in earnest,

Turn them away from their meaning,
and answer with flattering phrases
This is not right, is not just, is not true
to the best that is in you;

For I know and esteem you,
and feel that your nature is noble,
Lifting mine up to a higher,
a more ethereal level.

Therefore I value your friendship,
and feel it perhaps the more keenly
If you say aught that implies
I am only as one among many,

If you make use of those common
and complimentary phrases
Most men think so fine,
in dealing and speaking with women,
But which women reject as insipid,
if not as insulting."

Mute and amazed was Alden;
and listened and looked at Priscilla,
Thinking he never had seen her
more fair, more divine in her beauty.
He who but yesterday pleaded
so glibly the cause of another,
Stood there embarrassed and silent,
and seeking in vain for an answer.
So the maiden went on,
and little divined or imagined
What was at work in his heart, that
made him so awkward and speechless.
"Let us, then, be what we are, and
speak what we think, and in all things
Keep ourselves loyal to truth,
and the sacred professions of friendship.
It is no secret I tell you,
nor am I ashamed to declare it:
I have liked to be with you, to see you,
to speak with you always.
So I was hurt at your words,
and a little affronted to hear you

Urge me to marry your friend, though he
were the Captain Miles Standish.
For I must tell you the truth;
much more to me is your friendship,
Than all the love he could give,
were he twice the hero you think him."
Then she extended her hand,
and Alden, who eagerly grasped it,
Felt all the wounds in his heart
that were aching and bleeding so sorely,
Healed by the touch of that hand, and
he said, with a voice full of feeling:
"Yes, we must ever be friends;
and of all who offer you friendship
Let me be ever the first, the truest,
the nearest and dearest!"

Casting a farewell look at the
glimmering sail of the May Flower,
Distant, but still in sight,
and sinking below the horizon,

Homeward together they walked,
with a strange indefinite feeling,

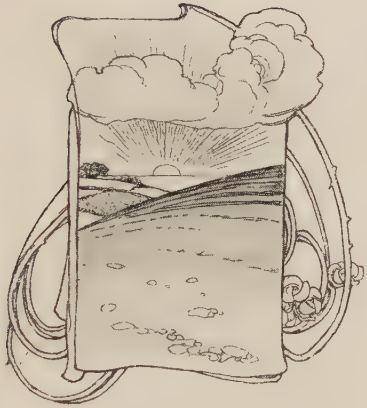
That all the rest had departed
and left them alone in the desert.

But, as they went through the fields
in the blessing and smile of the sunshine,
Lighter grew their hearts,
and Priscilla said very archly:

"Now that our terrible Captain
has gone in pursuit of the Indians,
Where he is happier far than he
would be commanding a household,

You may speak boldly, and tell me
of all that happened between you,
When you returned last night, and
said how ungrateful you found me."
Thereupon answered John Alden,
and told her the whole of the story,—
Told her his own despair, and the
direful wrath of Miles Standish.
Whereat the maiden smiled,
and said between laughing and earnest,
"He is a little chimney,
and heated hot in a moment!"
But as he gently rebuked her,
and told her how he had suffered,—
How he had even determined to sail
that day in the May Flower,
And had remained for her sake,
on hearing the dangers that threatened,—
All her manner was changed,
and she said with a faltering accent,
"Truly I thank you for this: how
good you have been to me always!"

Thus, as a pilgrim devout,
who toward Jerusalem journeys,
Taking three steps in advance,
and one reluctantly backward,
Urged by importunate zeal,
and withheld by pangs of contrition;
Slowly but steadily onward,
receding yet ever advancing,
Journeyed this Puritan youth
to the Holy Land of his longings,
Urged by the fervour of love,
and withheld by remorseful misgivings.



VII.

THE MARCH OF MILES STANDISH.

Meanwhile the stalwart Miles Standish
was marching steadily northward,
Winding through forest and swamp,
and along the trend of the seashore,
All day long, with hardly a halt,
the fire of his anger
Burning and crackling within,
and the sulphurous odour of powder
Seeming more sweet to his nostrils
than all the scents of the forest.
Silent and moody he went, and much
he revolved his discomfort;

He who was used to success,
and to easy victories always,
Thus to be flouted, rejected,
and laughed to scorn by a maiden,
Thus to be mocked and betrayed by
the friend whom most he had trusted!
Ah! 'twas too much to be borne,
and he fretted and chafed in his armour!

"I alone am to blame," he muttered,
"for mine was the folly.
What has a rough old soldier,
grown grim and gray in the harness,
Used to the camp and its ways,
to do with the wooing of maidens?
'Twas but a dream,—let it pass,—
let it vanish like so many others!
What I thought was a flower,
is only a weed, and is worthless!
Out of my heart will I pluck it,
and throw it away, and henceforward

The stalwart Miles Standish
was marching steadily northward.

Be but a fighter of battles,
a lover and wooer of dangers!"
Thus he revolved in his mind
his sorry defeat and discomfort,
While he was marching by day
or lying at night in the forest,

Looking up at the trees,
and the constellations beyond them.

After a three days' march
he came to an Indian encampment

Pitched on the edge of a meadow,
between the sea and the forest;
Women at work by the tents,
and the warriors, horrid with war-paint,
Seated about a fire,
and smoking and talking together;
Who, when they saw from afar
the sudden approach of the white men,
Saw the flash of the sun
on breastplate and sabre and musket,
Straightway leaped to their feet,
and two, from among them advancing,
Came to parley with Standish,
and offer him furs as a present;
Friendship was in their looks,
but in their hearts there was hatred.
Braves of the tribe were these,
and brothers gigantic in stature,
Huge as Goliath of Gath,
or the terrible Og, king of Bashan;
One was Pecksuot named,
and the other was called Wattawamat.

Round their necks were suspended
their knives in scabbards of wampum,
Two-edged, trenchant knives,
with points as sharp as a needle.

Other arms had they none,
for they were cunning and crafty.
"Welcome, English!" they said,—these
words they learned from the traders

Touching at times on the coast,
to barter and chaffer for peltries.
Then in their native tongue
they began to parley with Standish,
Through his guide and interpreter,
Hobomok, friend of the white man,
Begging for blankets and knives,
but mostly for muskets and powder,
Kept by the white man, they said,
concealed, with the plague, in his cellars,
Ready to be let loose,
and destroy his brother the red man!
But when Standish refused,
and said he would give them the Bible,
Suddenly changing their tone,
they began to boast and to bluster.
Then Wattawamat advanced with a
stride in front of the other,
And, with a lofty demeanour,
thus vauntingly spake to the Captain:
"Now Wattawamat can see,
by the fiery eyes of the Captain,

Angry is he in his heart;
but the heart of the brave Wattawamat
Is not afraid at the sight.
He was not born of a woman,

But on a mountain, at night,
from an oak-tree riven by lightning,
Forth he sprang at a bound,
with all his weapons about him,

Shouting, "Who is there here to fight
with the brave Wattawamat?"
Then he unsheathed his knife, and,
whetting the blade on his left hand,

Held it aloft and displayed
a woman's face on the handle:
Saying, with bitter expression
and look of sinister meaning:

"I have another at home,
with the face of a man on the handle;
By and by they shall marry;
and there will be plenty of children!"

Then stood Pecksuot forth, self-vaunting,
insulting Miles Standish:
While with his fingers he patted
the knife that hung at his bosom,
Drawing it half from its sheath,
and plunging it back, as he muttered,
"By and by it shall see; it shall eat;
ah, ha! but shall speak not!
This is the mighty Captain
the white men have sent to destroy us!
He is a little man; let him go
and work with the women!"

Meanwhile Standish had noted
the faces and figures of Indians

Peeping and creeping about
from bush to tree in the forest,
Feigning to look for game
with arrows set on their bow-strings,
Drawing about him still closer and
closer the net of their ambush.
But undaunted he stood, and dissembled
and treated them smoothly;
So the old chronicles say,
that were writ in the days of the fathers.
But when he heard their defiance,
the boast, the taunt, and the insult,
All the hot blood of his race, of
Sir Hugh and of Thurston de Standish,
Boiled and beat in his heart,
and swelled in the veins of his temples.
Headlong he leaped on the boaster, and,
snatching his knife from its scabbard,
Plunged it into his heart,
and, reeling backward, the savage
Fell with his face to the sky,
and a fiendlike fierceness upon it.

Straight there arose from the forest
the awful sound of the war-whoop,
And, like a flurry of snow
on the whistling wind of December,

Swift and sudden and keen
came a flight of feathery arrows.
Then came a cloud of smoke, and out
of the cloud came the lightning

Out of the lightning thunder;
and death unseen ran before it.
Frightened the savages fled for shelter
in swamp and in thicket,

Hotly pursued and beset: but their
sachem, the brave Wattawamat,
Fled not; he was dead.
Unswerving and swift had a bullet

Frightened the savages fled for shelter in swamp and in thicket.

Passed through his brain, and he fell
with both hands clutching the greensward,
Seeming in death to hold back from
his foe the land of his fathers.

There on the flowers of the meadow
the warriors lay, and above them,
Silent, with folded arms, stood
Hobomok, friend of the white man.
Smiling at length he exclaimed
to the stalwart Captain of Plymouth:
Pecksuot bragged very loud, of his
courage, his strength, and his stature,—
Mocked the great Captain, and called
him a little man; but I see now
Big enough have you been to lay
him speechless before you!"

Thus the first battle was fought
and won by the stalwart Miles Standish.

When the tidings thereof were brought
to the village of Plymouth,
And as a trophy of war
the head of the brave Wattawamat
Scowled from the roof of the fort, which
at once was a church and a fortress,
All who beheld it rejoiced, and praised
the Lord, and took courage.
Only Priscilla averted her face
from this spectre of terror,
Thanking God in her heart that
she had not married Miles Standish;
Shrinking, fearing almost, lest,
coming home from his battles,
He should lay claim to her hand,
as the prize and reward of his valour.

VIII.

THE SPINNING-WHEEL.

Month after month passed away, and
in Autumn the ships of the merchants
Came with kindred and friends,
with cattle and corn for the Pilgrims.
All in the village was peace;
the men were intent on their labours,
Busy with hewing and building,
with garden-plot and with merestead,
Busy with breaking the glebe,
and mowing the grass in the meadows,
Searching the sea for its fish,
and hunting the deer in the forest.
All in the village was peace;
but at times the rumour of warfare

Filled the air with alarm,
and the apprehension of danger.
Bravely the stalwart Standish
was scouring the land with his forces,
Waxing valiant in fight
and defeating the alien armies,
Till his name had become
a sound of fear to the nations
Anger was still in his heart,
but at times the remorse and contrition
Which in all noble natures
succeed the passionate outbreak,
Came like a rising tide,
that encounters the rush of a river,
Staying its current awhile,
but making it bitter and brackish.

Meanwhile Alden at home
had built him a new habitation,
Solid, substantial, of timber rough-hewn
from the firs of the forest.

Wooden-barred was the door,
and the roof was covered with rushes;
Latticed the windows were,
and the window-panes were of paper,

Oiled to admit the light,
while wind and rain were excluded.
There too he dug a well,
and around it planted an orchard:

Still may be seen to this day some
trace of the well and the orchard.
Close to the house was the stall,
where, safe and secure from annoyance,
Raghorn, the snow-white bull,
that had fallen to Alden's allotment
In the division of cattle,
might ruminate in the night-time
Over the pastures he cropped,
made fragrant by sweet pennyroyal.

Oft when his labour was finished,
with eager feet would the dreamer
Follow the pathway that ran through
the woods to the house of Priscilla,
Led by illusions romantic
and subtile deceptions of fancy,
Pleasure disguised as duty, and love
in the semblance of friendship.
Ever of her he thought, when he
fashioned the walls of his dwelling;

Ever of her he thought,
when he delved in the soil of his garden;
Ever of her he thought,
when he read in his Bible on Sunday

Praise of the virtuous woman,
as she is described in the Proverbs,—
How the heart of her husband
doth safely trust in her always,
How all the days of her life
she will do him good, and not evil,

How she seeketh the wool and the
flax and worketh with gladness,
How she layeth her hand
to the spindle and holdeth the distaff,
How she is not afraid of the snow
for herself or her household,
Knowing her household are clothed
with the scarlet cloth of her weaving!

So as she sat at her wheel
one afternoon in the Autumn,
Alden, who opposite sat, and was
watching her dexterous fingers,
As if the thread she was spinning
were that of his life and his fortune,
After a pause in their talk,
thus spake to the sound of the spindle.
"Truly, Priscilla," he said, "when
I see you spinning and spinning,
Never idle a moment,
but thrifty and thoughtful of others,

Suddenly you are transformed,
are visibly changed in a moment;
You are no longer Priscilla,
but Bertha the Beautiful Spinner."

Here the light foot on the treadle
grew swifter and swifter; the spindle
Uttered an angry snarl, and the
thread snapped short in her fingers;

While the impetuous speaker,
not heeding the mischief, continued:
"You are the beautiful Bertha,
the spinner, the queen of Helvetia;

She whose story I read at a stall
in the streets of Southampton,
Who, as she rode on her palfrey,
o'er valley and meadow and mountain,

Ever was spinning her thread
from a distaff fixed to her saddle.
She was so thrifty and good,
that her name passed into a proverb.
So shall it be with your own,
when the spinning-wheel shall no longer
Hum in the house of the farmer,
and fill its chambers with music.
Then shall the mothers, reproving,
relate how it was in her childhood,
Praising the good old times,
and the days of Priscilla the spinner!"
Straight uprose from her wheel
the beautiful Puritan maiden,
Pleased with the praise of her thrift
from him whose praise was the sweetest,
Drew from the reel on the table
a snowy skein of her spinning,
Thus making answer, meanwhile,
to the flattering phrases of Alden!
"Come, you must not be idle;
if I am a pattern for housewives,

Show yourself equally worthy
of being the model of husbands.
Hold this skein on your hands,
while I wind it, ready for knitting;
Then who knows but hereafter, when
fashions have changed and the manners,
Fathers may talk to their sons of
the good old times of John Alden!"
Thus, with a jest and a laugh,
the skein on his hands she adjusted,
He sitting awkwardly there,
with his arms extended before him,
She standing graceful, erect, and
winding the thread from his fingers,
Sometimes chiding a little
his clumsy manner of holding,
Sometimes touching his hands,
as she disentangled expertly
Twist or knot in the yarn, unawares—
for how could she help it?—
Sending electrical thrills through
every nerve in his body.

Lo! in the midst of this scene,
a breathless messenger entered,

Bringing in hurry and heat the
terrible news from the village.

Yes; Miles Standish was dead!—
an Indian had brought them the tidings,

Slain by a poisoned arrow,
shot down in the front of the battle,

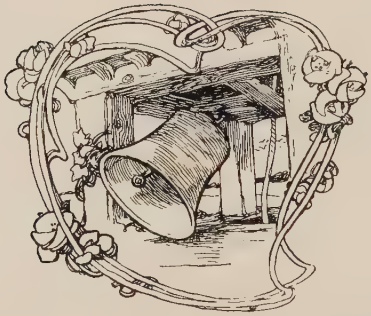
Into an ambush beguiled,
cut off with the whole of his forces;
All the town would be burned,
and all the people be murdered!
Such were the tidings of evil that burst
on the hearts of the hearers
Silent and statue-like stood Priscilla,
her face looking backward
Still at the face of the speaker,
her arms uplifted in horror;
But John Alden, upstarting,
as if the barb of the arrow
Piercing the heart of his friend had
struck his own, and had sundered
Once and for ever the bonds that
held him bound as a captive,
Wild with excess of sensation,
the awful delight of his freedom,
Mingled with pain and regret,
unconscious of what he was doing,
Clasped, almost with a groan,
the motionless form of Priscilla,

Pressing her close to his heart,
as for ever his own, and exclaiming:
"Those whom the Lord hath united,
let no man put them asunder!"

Even as rivulets twain,
from distant and separate sources,
Seeing each other afar, as they leap
from the rocks, and pursuing

Pressing her close to his heart.

Each one its devious path,
but drawing nearer and nearer,
Rush together at last,
at their trysting-place in the forest;
So these lives that had run
thus far in separate channels,
Coming in sight of each other,
then swerving and flowing asunder,
Parted by barriers strong,
but drawing nearer and nearer,
Rushed together at last,
and one was lost in the other.



IX.

THE WEDDING-DAY.

Forth from the curtain of clouds,
from the tent of purple and scarlet,
Issued the sun, the great High-Priest,
in his garments resplendent,
Holiness unto the Lord,
in letters of light, on his forehead,
Round the hem of his robe
the golden bells and the pomegranates.
Blessing the world he came,
and the bars of vapour beneath him
Gleamed like a grate of brass,
and the sea at his feet was a laver!

This was the wedding morn
of Priscilla the Puritan maiden.
Friends were assembled together;
the Elder and Magistrate also
Graced the scene with their presence,
and stood like the Law and the Gospel,
One with the sanction of earth
and one with the blessing of heaven.
Simple and brief was the wedding,
as that of Ruth and of Boaz.
Softly the youth and the maiden
repeated the words of betrothal,
Taking each other for husband and wife
in the Magistrate's presence,
After the Puritan way,
and the laudable custom of Holland.
Fervently then, and devoutly,
the excellent Elder of Plymouth
Prayed for the hearth and the home,
that were founded that day in affection,
Speaking of life and of death,
and imploring Divine benedictions.

Lo! when the service was ended,
a form appeared on the threshold,
Clad in armour of steel,
a sombre and sorrowful figure!

Why does the bridegroom start
and stare at the strange apparition?
Why does the bride turn pale,
and hide her face on his shoulder?

Is it a phantom of air,—
a bodiless, spectral illusion?
Is it a ghost from the grave,
that has come to forbid the betrothal?
Long had it stood there unseen,
a guest uninvited, unwelcomed;
Over its clouded eyes there had
passed at times an expression
Softening the gloom and revealing
the warm heart hidden beneath them,
As when across the sky the driving
rack of the rain-cloud
Grows for a moment thin,
and betrays the sun by its brightness.
Once it had lifted its hand,
and moved its lips, but was silent,
As if an iron will had mastered
the fleeting intention.
But when were ended the troth
and the prayer and the last benediction,
Into the room it strode,
and the people beheld with amazement

Bodily there in his armour,
Miles Standish, the Captain of Plymouth!
Grasping the bridegroom's hand,
he said with emotion, "Forgive me!

I have been angry and hurt,—
too long have I cherished the feeling;
I have been cruel and hard,
but now, thank God! it is ended.

Mine is the same hot blood that leaped
in the veins of Hugh Standish,
Sensitive, swift to resent,
but as swift in atoning for error.
Never so much as now was
Miles Standish the friend of John Alden."
Thereupon answered the bridegroom:
"Let all be forgotten between us,—
All save the dear old friendship,
and that shall grow older and dearer!"
Then the Captain advanced,
and, bowing, saluted Priscilla,
Gravely, and after the manner of
old-fashioned gentry in England,
Something of camp and of court,
of town and of country, commingled,
Wishing her joy of her wedding,
and loudly lauding her husband.
Then he said with a smile:
"I should have remembered the adage,—
If you would be well served, you must
serve yourself; and moreover,

No man can gather cherries in Kent
at the season of Christmas!"

Great was the people's amazement,
and greater yet their rejoicing,
Thus to behold once more
the sunburnt face of their Captain,
Whom they had mourned as dead; and
they gathered and crowded about him,

Eager to see him and hear him,
forgetful of bride and of bridegroom,
Questioning, answering, laughing,
and each interrupting the other,

Till the good Captain declared,
being quite overpowered and bewildered,
He had rather by far break
into an Indian encampment,

Than come again to a wedding
to which he had not been invited.

Meanwhile the bridegroom went forth
and stood with the bride at the doorway,
Breathing the perfumed air
of that warm and beautiful morning.
Touched with autumnal tints,
but lonely and sad in the sunshine,
Lay extended before them
the land of toil and privation;
There were the graves of the dead,
and the barren waste of the seashore,
There the familiar fields,
the groves of pine, and the meadows;
But to their eyes transfigured,
it seemed as the Garden of Eden,
Filled with the presence of God,
whose voice was the sound of the ocean.

Soon was their vision disturbed
by the noise and stir of departure,
Friends coming forth from the house,
and impatient of longer delaying,
Each with his plan for the day,
and the work that was left uncompleted.
Then from a stall near at hand,
amid exclamations of wonder,
Alden the thoughtful, the careful,
so happy, so proud of Priscilla,
Brought out his snow-white bull,
obeying the hand of its master,
Led by a cord that was tied
to an iron ring in its nostrils,
Covered with crimson cloth,
and a cushion placed for a saddle.
She should not walk, he said, through
the dust and heat of the noonday;
Nay, she should ride like a queen,
not plod along like a peasant.
Somewhat alarmed at first,
but reassured by the others,

Onward the bridal procession now moved to their new habitation.

Placing her hand on the cushion,
her foot in the hand of her husband,
Gaily, with joyous laugh,
Priscilla mounted her palfrey.

"Nothing is wanting now," he said
with a smile, "but the distaff;
Then you would be in truth
my queen, my beautiful Bertha!"

Onward the bridal procession now
moved to their new habitation,
Happy husband and wife,
and friends conversing together.

Pleasantly murmured the brook,
as they crossed the ford in the forest
Pleased with the image that passed,
like a dream of love through its bosom,

Tremulous, floating in air, o'er the
depths of the azure abysses.
Down through the golden leaves
the sun was pouring his splendours,
Gleaming on purple grapes, that,
from branches above them suspended,
Mingled their odorous breath with the
balm of the pine and the fir-tree,
Wild and sweet as the clusters
that grew in the valley of Eshcol.
Like a picture it seemed of
the primitive, pastoral ages,
Fresh with the youth of the world,
and recalling Rebecca and Isaac,
Old and yet ever new,
and simple and beautiful always,
Love immortal and young in the
endless succession of lovers.
So through the Plymouth woods
passed onward the bridal procession.

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